

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 489
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Yiddish Short Stories

Edited by
Isaac Goldberg

PJ
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Y52
1923

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INTRODUCTION

Of the authors represented in this little collection, Isaac Leib Perez stands foremost in time and in renown. By more than one competent critic he has been found worthy to occupy a distinguished place among the writers of the nineteenth century in any tongue. Mediocre as a dramatist, he rises as a poet and particularly as an artist in prose to moments of unaffected genius. Rarely is his allegory without that humanizing quality which keeps it from degenerating into merely pictorial evasions of thought. If allegory, not even in the hands of a Dante, cannot always be kept free from the adulteration of a wilful symbolism, there are times when it represents so successfully the inner intention of the creator that it becomes in a very true sense a creation. That arch-enemy of allegorical writing, Benedetto Croce, has shown how in many a passage of the great Florentine's *Commedia* it is possible, indeed, esthetically necessary,—to throw all thought of Dante's concealed meanings to the winds and let the picture and the words speak for the human Dante behind them. Before Croce, Federico De Sanctis—who anticipated more than a little of Croce's methods in literary criticism, and to whom Croce is so greatly indebted—demonstrated the same sanative truth. In such simple tales of Perez as "Bontsche the Silent," or the "Three Gifts" here included, the allegorical method is purged of all cryptic

allusions. It becomes essentially human, essentially of the earth, for all its preoccupations with heaven.

Pinski, perhaps the foremost dramatist of his race, first won his reputation for his stories of the rising Yiddish proletariat. He is, indeed, the discoverer of the proletariat in Yiddish fiction, and was himself "discovered" by Perez Pinski is pre-eminently a psychologist. Whether one reads his numerous plays* or the book of tales that appeared in English a number of years ago, one divines first of all the prober or human souls and the passions engendered within them. His "Beruriah" is, to me, one of the masterpieces of the short story in modern days, none the less contemporaneous for its origin in a Talmudic setting. "The Tale of a Hungry Man," by which he is here represented, combines in admirable fashion his early proletarian interests with his psychological methods.

Asch is to the Yiddish novel what Pinski is to the drama. He is that rare phenomenon, a spontaneous artist with all the virtues and defects of improvisation. Of his longer novels, "Mottke the Vagabond" and "Uncle Moses," both in English, give an idea of his accomplishments with old-world and new-world settings. In his short fiction he is notable for a poetic realism, a mingling of the so-called romantic and the so-called realistic, that is evident in so outwardly coarse a play as "The God of Vengeance."

*See the end of the book for Yiddish works procurable in English.

Raisin is, in fiction, the artist of miniatures, of cameos, of impressions. He is hardly concerned with the surprise-ending, the "punch" and other commercial desiderata of our lesser American stories. With the facility of journalistic comparisons he has been called "the Yiddish Chekhov"; who, among the Jewish writers, has not at one time or other been the "Yiddish This-or-That?" Yet there is an element of suggestive virtue in the coupling of the names, and there have been moments when Chekhov and Maupassant signed worse things than "A Game," though often they signed far better.

Shapiro, of the writers here included, is the least widely known. There is something unreal to his visions, yet for all their external unreality they grip the reader with an indubitable power. "The Kiss" is one of his best pogrom tales. If he is scarcely known to outsiders it is because he deserves a far greater recognition from his own people.

Opatoshu (pen name of Joseph Opatovsky) has strengthened a reputation as short-story writer with his added success as a novelist. His fondness for nature, for animals and for Khassidic types provides a rich background for his restless imagination. Of the younger writers—if a writer is still young under forty—he shows as good promise as any of attaining to a lofty place.*

ISAAC GOLDBERG.

*For permission to include Pinski's *A Tale of a Hungry Man* from the volume of his short stories published by Brentano's under the title *Temptations*, I am indebted to both the author and the publishers.—I. G.

THREE GIFTS

ISAAC LEIB PEREZ

I. THE SCALES OF JUSTICE

Somewhere many and many a year ago, a Jew breathed his last.

No one, of course, may live for ever. The man was dead; the attentions due the dead were paid, and a grave among the folk of his own faith lodged him.

The grave closed over him, the orphaned son recited his Kaddish and the soul flew upward—to Judgment.

On arriving there it found the scale of Justice already swinging in the court chamber. Here the good deeds and the evil were to be weighed. And forthwith the dead man's Advocate enters, the Good Spirit of his former life. A pure, snow-white sack is in his hand and he stands near the right scale of the Balance.

And behold the dead man's Accuser enters—the Evil Spirit of his former life. An unclean sack is in his hands and he stands near the left scale of the Balance. The sack of pure white contains the good deeds. The sack that is begrimed and black—the evil, sinful deeds. And the vindicator of the soul pours out the contents of the white sack on the right scale. The good deeds are of the odor of incense and glow with the radiancy of the stars. The Accuser pours out the contents of the unclean sack on the left scale of the Balance. The evil deeds

—Heaven protect us—are as black as coal, and reek of the very stench of tar and pitch.

And the poor soul stares at it all—and gasps. It never dreamt to behold such a distinction between the “Good” and the “Evil.” “There” it had often recognized neither of them and had mistaken the one for the other.

The scales rise gradually. Now the one, now the other moves up and down....and the indicator oscillates now a hair's breadth to the left, now a trifle towards the right. But a hair's breadth variation and that gradually....an ordinary mortal this soul must have been; neither rebellious to the Holy Spirit nor yet dwelling much within it....capable of trivial virtues and trivial vices only. The scales held but little particles, tiny dots of things, at times hardly visible to the eye.

And yet, what a clamor of joy and of gladness from the empyrean when the Balance indicator turns but a trifle towards the right and what racking cries of agony mark every turn to the left. And slowly, ever so slowly the angels empty the sacks. With a zest they show up the tiny particles, just as decent burghers will add one farthing to another in self-exhibition to a seeing world.

However, the deepest well will run dry—and the sacks, too, are soon empty.

“Is that all?” inquires the court-usher. He, too, is an angel among his like. Both the Good and the Evil Spirits turn their sacks inside out. Absolutely nothing more. The court-usher steps forward to the Balance. He examines the indicator to see whether it is in-

clined towards the right or the left; and he stares at it good and long; for he beholds something that none ever saw since first the Heavens and the Earth knew creation....

"Why such hesitancy?" demands the Chief Justice. And the usher mutters:

"But one moment! The index is exactly in the center. The Evil deeds and the Good are exactly of the same weight."

"Is that absolutely so?" queries a voice from about the table.

The usher looks yet again: "Yea even to a hair's breadth."

The Heavenly Tribunal holds its consultation and the decision as to the sentence is thus pronounced: "Since the Evil deeds do not weigh more than the good—the soul, of course, is free from Hell. But, on the other hand, since the Good deeds do not prevail over the Evil—neither can Paradise receive her.* Therefore she is to be neither here, nor there, but a wanderer between the realms of Heaven and Earth, until the Lord have mercy upon her and in His goodness call her unto him."

And the usher of the courts leads the soul away.

She sobs, and bemoans her fate.

"Why art thou weeping?" he asks her. "'Tis true thou wilt not know the joy and the gladness of Eden, but neither will the agonies and pangs of Hell be thine."

But the soul, unconsolated, replies:

"The worst agony is preferable to nothing at all. Nothing is most dreadful...."

*Soul is feminine in Yiddish. (tr.)

And the heavenly usher pities her and offers her some advice.

"Fly downward little soul, and hover about the living world of men. Gaze not unto heaven. For what canst thou see on the other side, but the little stars. Radiant little people—they certainly are, but alas, very cold. They know no pity. They'll never speak to the Lord about you. Only the pious souls of Paradise will go to such trouble for a poor, exiled soul....but they....hearken unto me....they do love gifts, fair and beautiful gifts."

The usher talked bitterly. "Such are the ways of Paradise, nowadays. Fly downward, then, to the living world and watch life there and its course. And if thou only catchest a glimpse of something that is surpassingly fair or good, seize thou it, and fly up to heaven. Present it as a gift to the pious there. Knock at the little window and in my name, speak to the angel-guard. And when thou wilt have brought three gifts—why then be certain that the gates of Heaven will be unbarred....they will manage to have it so for thee....At the Throne of Honor, the well-born are not loved....but the well-grown...."

And in this wise, and with compassion, he thrusts her out of Paradise.

II. THE FIRST GIFT

The poor little soul flies downward to the world of the living in search of gifts for the pious people of Heaven. It hovers about, everywhere; about the villages and the towns, about every habitation of man, amid the burning rays

of hottest summer; amid the drops and water spears of rainy autumn; amid the silver web, fantastical, in the last days of summer; amid the snowflakes that fall from above....It gazes about and about till it well-nigh spends its sight.

Wherever and whenever it spies a Jew it runs hastily up to him and looks at him intently—perhaps he is on his way to Prayer—to bless the name of the Lord. Wherever a light breaks through the chink of a shutter—she is there, to peep inside, to see whether the Lord's fragrant flowerets, the secret deeds of good, blossom in that silent house. Alas!....most of the time it must dart away from the window in agony and dismay....

And thus season follows season, and year follows year. Oft, the soul becomes moody and sullen. Cities turn into graveyards, the graveyards into fields of pasture; forests are felled. The pebbles of the brook become sand; rivers have changed their courses; myriads of stars have fallen and myriads of souls have flown upward; but the gracious Lord has never thought of her; neither has she found aught that was beautiful or good.

And she thinks within herself: "How poor the whole world is. Its people—how mediocre; their souls—how dark and obscure....How can aught good be found here? Alas! I must rove about—an exile, forever."

But suddenly a red flame bursts before her. Out of the dark and gloomy night a red flame leaps forth. She stares about her....'Tis from an upper window of a house that the flame has

shot forth. Robbers are attacking a wealthy man. Masks are on their faces. One holds a burning torch in his hands; another holds a blazing knife at the man's breast and repeats his threat again and again:

"Jew, make but the slightest motion and you are dead. The knife will most assuredly pass through your back, then." The others are all busy, opening chests and drawers. The man looks serenely about him, although the knife is at his breast. The brows above his lucid eyes do not quiver. Not a hair of that gray beard that reaches to the waist moves. All of it seems to be something that is not his concern. "The Lord hath given, the Lord taketh away," he muses, and his pale lips mutter: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

"One is not born thus and one may not carry it all to his grave." He views them calmly when they are about to clear the last drawer of the last bureau and watches, in absolute silence, the pillage of the gold and the silver, the jewelry and other precious things!

Perhaps he is renouncing it all!

But all at once—as the robbers are about to lay hold upon the last hidden treasure—a little sack, hidden in the most secret nook of all—he forgets himself—trembles all over, his eyes are bloodshot, and he stretches his right hand forward, to the weapon. He would, as it seems, cry out!

"Touch it not!"

But the cry is unuttered. A red, vaporous stream of blood shoots forth, the knife has done its work... It is the heart's blood that be-

sprinkles the little sack. He falls to the ground. The robbers tear the little sack open in a hurry. That will be the best—the most precious gain of all!

But what a grievous error! The blood had been shed in vain—neither silver, nor gold, nor jewels were there. Naught of any value in this world. It was a little measure of sand from the Holy Land, to be strewn on his face at burial. That, the wealthy man had wished to save from the hands and gaze of strangers. That had shed his blood....and the soul seizes a blood-soiled particle of the sand and knocks at the little window of Heaven. Her first gift found ready acceptance.

III. THE SECOND GIFT

"Remember now," said the angel as he barred the window. "Remember—two more offerings."

"The Lord will aid me"—thinks the soul, grown hopeful; and joyously flies down again. However, her gladness lasts but a little while. Again, years follow years and she can find nothing that is surpassingly beautiful. And her melancholy returns to her. "The world has, it seems, forsaken the way of the Lord, and like a spring ever runs out and out. The more the water that flows into the soil, the more sucked in—the more the soil becomes foul and unclean. Fewer are the gifts for heaven then. Men become ever petty and more petty. Their good deeds grow tiny; their evil deeds blacker and blacker dust—their deeds are hardly visible to the eye!..."

And thus speaking to herself she seems to think that should the Lord command all the evil deeds and the good of the world to be weighed in the Balance, that the needle would hardly move, yea, not even tremble. The earth can hardly rise or fall now, she is but a wanderer from the empyrean above to the black abyss of Sheol below. A splendid cause for an eternal disputation between the spirits of good and of evil; just such a one as the eternal dispute between darkness and light, heat and cold, life and death....

The earth rocks to and fro. She can neither ascend nor descend. Thus we ever have weddings and divorces, parties and funerals, love and hate—ever, forever.

Suddenly the blare of trumpets and of horns resounds. The soul looks down—and beholds an ancient German town. All sorts of roofs, narrow and bent surround the courthouse. A motley crowd fills the place. People peer out of the windows; others throng the roofs, and some sit astride the beams at the edge, where they are propped up by the wall.

A table, covered with a green cloth stands at the head of the court-hall. The cloth has golden tassels and fringes. The men of the court are held with golden hooks. They wear sable caps and large feathers stick from the shining buttons to which they are sewed. At the head of the table, the President of the court is seated. An Eagle hovers overhead....

A young Jewess, all bound, stands on one side. Ten slaves hold a white horse firmly near her. The president has risen and with

his eyes towards the market-place, he reads the paper he has in his hand—her sentence.

"This Jewess," he says, "is guilty of a monstrous sin. Even the Lord, in his graciousness and great mercy, could not forgive her that.....

"On our last and most sacred holiday, she slunk out of her ghetto and walked through the clean streets of our town....

"She has sullied the Holy procession. Her eyes have defiled the sacred images that we bore with hymnal song and music through the streets....

"The hymns of our innocent children, or our young, clad in snow-white garments, her ears have sucked in—and the beating of the holy drum likewise....who knows whether the devil, the foul friend, has not transformed himself into this image of the Jewess, of this cursed Rabbi's daughter? Who knows whether thus, he has not touched and polluted a holy treasure of ours?

"What was the fiend up to, in this fair disguise? We need not equivocate. Undoubtedly, she is fair; a devilish beauty is hers—Do but look at the wicked sparkle of her eyes, and the modest and humble pose of her silken eyelashes....

"See you her alabaster face? It has indeed grown paler since her imprisonment, but duller not a whit!....Look at her fingers. How thin and long and how transparent they seem in the sunlight!....

"What could the fiend have wanted but to dissuade a soul from its Holy faith, and that he has done indeed:

"What a beautiful maiden!" exclaimed one of our own Knighthood—a member of one of our best families.....

"It was more than patience could endure. The crowd noticed her and lay hands upon her—The fiend did not even stir for defense—How could she? There were all pure of sin. They had been absolved. He had no power over them.

"Let this then be the sentence of the devil—of the fiend disguised in this form of a Jewish maiden:

"Bind her hair, her fiendishly long hair, to the tail of this savage horse....

"Let the horse fly over the streets and drag her like a 'corpse' across the very streets she has polluted in defiance of our sacred laws.

"May her blood besprinkle them and wash those that her feet have besmirched!"

Savage cries of joy fill the market-place and when the great din is over the convicted woman is asked her last wish.

She answers calmly: "I have one wish Give me but a few pins."

"Her grief has made her mad!" think the men of the court.

"Not so," she answers serenely and frigidly: "This is my last wish; my last desire."

They gratified her in that.

"Now, bind her!" commands the President of the Court.

The hands of the servants tremble as they bind her long dark braids to the tail of the horse, which is so wild that he can hardly be controlled....

"Make room!" the command is heard. There is a wild rush forward. The crowd huddles close to the walls of the buildings. All raise their hands. All are ready to goad the horse along. Some have whips, some have cords, others wiretips. Their breath is stifled for the moment; their faces are aflame, their eyes sparkle and in all this hubbub no one notices how the convicted maiden bends down and pins her skirts at the seam and pushes the pins deep into her body, so that it may be covered absolutely when she is dragged about in the streets. Only the exiled soul notices it all....

"Free the horse," the command is heard again. The slaves have leaped away. The horse bounds forward. A deafening shout fills the air. Whips and cords and wires are whirled about and whistle loudly. The horse, wild with terror, rushes across the market place, across the streets, over the alley and far, far out of the town....

The vagrant soul has drawn a blood-stained pin out of the victim's body and is on her way to heaven with it!

And the angel at the little window soothes her, saying: "But *one* more gift!"

IV. THE THIRD GIFT

And downward again the soul wends her way. But one more gift! And as before, year follows year and melancholy has its grip upon her. The world has grown little indeed. Men are becoming ever more insignificant. Their

deeds too are tiny and more so; the good and the evil alike....

And a new thought occurs to her:

"What if the Lord, Blessed be His name, were to halt the world process this very moment and announce the final Judgment; would not then the Advocate appear on the right side of the Balance and pour out the contents of his white sack, its tiny particles and little grains of sand; would not the Accuser follow and empty his sack on the left scale—his little wee bits and fragments? What a long process that would be! What a multitude of little things!

"And when the emptying of the sack is completed, what then? Of course, the indicator would be pointing right to the center!

"Such insignificant things weigh nothing; no matter what their number. Indeed, what can be the weight of a tiny thread, of a straw or of an empty husk?

"What might the decision of the Lord be then?

"Would he turn the whole into a void again? Certainly not; for the Evil deeds do not weigh more than the good.

"Perhaps he might grant salvation to all. But that, too, is unlikely, for the deeds of Good do not prevail over those of Evil.

"It is hard to see what would follow then.

"Might he not say: 'Pass ye along. Rove ye from the realms of Hell to Heaven amid Love and Hate, in tears of mercy or vaporous blood.from cradle unto grave, rove ye farther—even farther.'"

However, Destiny seems to have planned the

deliverance of the Soul from her gloomy reflections. The din of beating drums arouses her....

"Where am I now, and what the time?" She cannot recognize the place. She has no idea of the time.

She beholds the courtyard of a prison. The rays of the sun hover about the little windows and even penetrate the iron bars.... They glide along the wall and fall upon a heap of sundry weapons supported there. The soldier-guards have but a moment ago received their whips....

Two long rows of soldiers and only a narrow passage between.

Who is it that must run the gauntlet here? Oh, it is but an insignificant Jew. A torn shirt is on his emaciated body and a skull-cap on his half-shaven head. There he is being led forth.

But what is his crime? What has he stolen? Has he robbed any one,—murdered?.... Perhaps it is but a false accusation. Is that not an ancient custom and were not many such before?

The soldiers smile as they ponder: What was the use of having all of us here? Would not half the number have sufficed!

He is thrust into the passage. He steps forward. He walks directly on. The lashes fall upon him. But he curses no one, neither does he falter or fall....

A fit of rage overwhelms the soldiers. He walks on and on!

The whips whistle in the air, fiendishly. They grip and coil around the body as serpents

do. The blood of the emaciated frame gushes forth and does not cease!

Whoop—whack! Whoop—whack! Suddenly a whip falling high, throws the skull-cap down to the ground. The doomed man notices it after a few paces....He stirs and reflects. He turns round again and walks onward, serenely calm though covered with streaming blood. The skull-cap is on his head.* He walks on till he falls....

And when he fell thus, the Soul ran swiftly up to him, and seized the cap that had cost so many innocent lashes, and with it she flew up to the little window of Heaven.

And the third gift also found acceptance! The pious Souls tried their best and spared no trouble: the doors of Eden were now open! And a voice of the "Oracle" was heard:

"These are truly beautiful gifts, of surpassing fairness....They may be of no practical use. They may not even serve for show.... But they are marvelous."

—Translated by Samuel P. Rudens.

*The head must be covered during all religious services.

THE JUDGMENT,

JOSEPH OPATOSHU

Simka, the fisherman, a massive, uncouth man, lived near Pincus, the teacher. Simka's peasant hut, with its straw roof that was black with age, stood at the end of the Joldovka, where the latter descends, stairlike, between towering cliffs and falls roaring into the Vistula. From far it seemed that the hut grew out of the cliffs, that it rocked and washed in the water like a little boat, surrounded by great silver ribbons.

The fisherman and his three sons stood coatless and barefooted with their trousers rolled about their knees, smearing large two-eared pails with cheese; Simka's wife, a strong, ruddy woman with a three-cornered, white shawl on her head, also stood barefooted. The toes of her feet were webbed like those of a goose. She was mending great nets. The men put stones into the pails to prevent the current from carrying them away. When a pail filled with fish, they swiftly lit pieces of thin wood, so that the fish would not see their way out, and pulled the pail to the shore. The quivering fish were dumped into a net, which was fastened to a raft tied to the shore with thick ropes.

Simka's youngest son, Zelik, sat on the raft. He was about ten and had a wart near his ear. He threw pieces of bread into a flask

of water in which a little goldfish swam about.

Zelik grew in the woods like a wild goat. Often he disappeared for days at a time. He would climb into a salt barge and go miles down the river. Nobody ever missed him. Once when he was gone for a week, his mother said something about it, but the rest remained silent. There was a reason. When Zelik was born with the wart, his mother was very frightened and sent for the old witch to exorcise the child. The witch advised her to keep a close watch over the child, lest Wanda, the queen of Vistula, steal him. The fisherman and his sons firmly believed that the stretch of water near which they lived was demanding a human sacrifice, for their catches were diminishing every year. The water must have what belonged to it.

Each time Zelik disappeared, all of them kept still, thinking that the water had at last taken its prey. But each time he came back, as if to spite them.

The Vistula had cast him forth three times. And because of this Simka wished to know nothing of him, and did not want to teach him, and Zelik always walked around in rags and tatters.

"Why are you sitting there doing nothing, you fool?" the mother cried out at Zelik.

"Go over to the 'teacher' and ask him how much fish they want by Saturday."

The boy caught up the flask with the goldfish, and ran into the wood.

Zelik thought that when he grew older he would not fish with pails. He would build himself a raft and catch fish with nets. And when he would grow rich (and he would surely grow rich) he would buy a pair of rubber boots with those long tops that would fasten with a buckle under the stomach, also a leather coat, and he would sail over the water in a real fishing smack, with a large steering wheel. Then he would build himself a house with a glass veranda, exactly like the one Pincus, the teacher, had. And perhaps he would give the goldfish to Rachel. She had been angry at him for the last two days, because he had cut off the tail of her black cat. But then, the cat deserved it. When the fish lay eggs she had no business to eat them. Yes, he would give the fish to Rachel. True, goldfish aren't to be found everyday in the Vistula. But that was nothing. When he grew older he would catch a whale, cut its insides out, and sew a pair of trousers and a coat for himself from the skin, so that only his eyes would show. And then he would swim with his fins all standing straight up, down to the goldfish. He knew that they lived in the deepest whirlpools. But he would tell Rachel to change the water, and to throw in a few bread-crumbs.

Rachel sat on the veranda consoling the black cat that lay with a swollen back on a soft basket.

"My poor little cat. Does it hurt much? Don't cry. Nikoli says it'll heal soon. And Zelik's wart will get so big, so big, see, like this," and she stretched out both hands. "It'll

be ugly," she laughed. "Zelik with a tail on his cheek!"

"Rachel, see, I've got a goldfish. Want it?"

Rachel turned away and pouted.

"I'm mad."

"Why are you mad?"

"Because you're a murderer."

"But my father told me to. I swear. He even told me to put your cat in a sack and throw it straight into the water from the hill."

"And you think you'll be forgiven? God will punish you. Nikolai says your wart must become as big as the tail you cut off."

Zelik lost himself for a moment. He put his hand to his cheek and it seemed to him that the wart was already becoming longer.

"It's a lie. How much will you bet that I won't have it at all by tomorrow? I've got something that'll take it away."

"What have you got?"

"I'll put pigeon blood on it a few times, and it will dry and fall off."

"Why didn't you do it before?"

"Because mama says a wart is lucky. If I take it off before I'm thirteen, my luck will go."

"Are you lucky?"

"Of course, see, the Vistula threw me up three times. And I can swim in the sea, too. My father is a fisherman so long, and he never caught a goldfish. And I know where they live, too. And you don't know."

"Where."

"In the whirlpools."

"Zelik, is it true that a whirlpool must get a man each year?"

"Of course. They live there together with the goldfish. You know, when I grow older, I'll swim down there to the goldfish."

"And if they won't let you go back?"

"Eh, they'll let me go back."

"And what will you do there?"

"All the treasures of the sea are there. I'll fill my pockets with gold and diamonds, and come back."

"And you'll take me, too?"

"You? You're mad at me."

"Of course I'm mad."

"Then I won't take you."

"Don't take me, then."

"Give me back my goldfish."

"The goldfish? Why are you so bad? Why did you take my cat and—"

"I swear I won't cut the tail off again."

"But you've cut it off already."

"Rachel, where are you? The dinner is cold," came the old servant's voice from the house.

"I'm coming," Rachel answered, and arose.

"Come to us tomorrow, Rachel. The storks are here already. You'll come?"

"I'll come." She entered the house.

II

The woods whispered happily. The air was filled with resin.

Zelik, tanned like a gipsy, walked barefoot through the forest. He avoided the common path and trudged over the black, swampy,

moss-covered earth. He was happy to feel the cool, soft earth yield beneath his feet like well kneaded dough. The boy had a key in his mouth, and whistled for all he was worth.

Rachel, happy, with flaming cheeks, with her shoes and stockings in her hands, followed him.

Sunbeams that had been hidden deep in the woods suddenly began to play and weave themselves around Rachel. They stole from the rear, kissed her, sprang back, and all of a sudden sprayed her with such silver light, she half closed her eyes, and shrieked happily.

The birds became happier, springing up suddenly from the deep grass, and flapping their wings. They remained hanging against the flaming sun, trilling their songs.

The woods whispered joyously. They smelled of resin. It seemed that scores of fiddlers were scattered all over the woods. They had grown tired and gradually had ceased their playing. But seeing the barefooted children hand in hand on the soft ground, they began to feel younger, and rubbed their brows rapidly against the yellow resin, and the tall pines trembled like tightly stretched violin strings, and they roared like a far, quiet sea—
Youth, O Youth.

When they came out of the wood the two sat down on the bank of the Vistula, and began to bathe their muddy feet in the clear water.

Wide green fields spotted with yellow flow-

ers stretched on the other margin of the Vistula. A white stork with a black tail startled over the field. He lifted his red legs like stilts. He raised proudly his long neck with its red beak, and noisily swallowed small green toads. When the sun appeared from behind a cloud, and began to shine, the stork stood up on one leg, hid its beak and half of its head under its wing, and remained standing in the middle of the field as if it were painted.

"Rachel, you know what would be nice?"

"What?"

"Swear you won't tell anybody."

"I swear."

"Go 'way. I think you will tell."

"I swear I won't, Zelik."

"Remember now." He lifted a finger to his nose. "You know what I've thought of?"

"What?"

"You'll never guess," he laughed.

"Oh, tell me," Rachel begged, taking Zelik's hand and rubbing a little wet foot against his.

"You know, if we could get a goose-egg, it would be so nice."

"Why do you need a goose-egg?"

"I would put it into the stork's nest, and it would hatch out a half-stork, half-geese."

"Will the stork let you do it?"

"I'll put it in before dawn, when both aren't in the nest."

"Zelik, you know what brings babies? Braina says that a stork brings the babies in a little basket. Where do the babies live?"

"In heaven."

"And when it rains?"

"When it rains? I don't know. I suppose they hide when the clouds come down to the Vis'la to drink."

"And the stork that stands over there, can it bring babies, too?"

"Of course," and Zelik stretched his hands. "Such a heap of babies."

"Go 'way, I'd be ashamed of Braina to bring a baby home. A little girl mustn't have babies. You must marry first, no?"

"Well, why did the Forester's Franka have a baby? She never married?"

"But she's not a Jewess."

A second stork, slightly smaller, with chalk white wings, gently descended on the field. The he-stork in the middle of the field, seemed to awake as from sleep, spread his wings, lifted his long neck, yawned, and began to run around and around the she-stork with his head lowered, crying, "Cla-clia." He stopped, lifted his slightly opened, red beak, in which he held a green toad, looked at the she-stork proudly, as if saying, "My wife will never die of hunger," and gave her the toad. And while she scarcely lifted her neck, rolled her eyes and swallowed the toad that was averse to make the journey down her throat, he pecked her lovingly with his beak, put his head under her wing and looked for something. He stood on one leg again, began to slap his wings, flew around the she-stork, ogled her, stretching his long, limber neck, and the erstwhile silent bird began to sing, "Cla-clia-qu, Cla-clia-qu."

Zelik came out of the water.

"Go home, Rachel, and bring an egg. The nest is empty by now. Put on your shoes."

Rachel joyously put on her shoes. She felt more comfortable, and jumped up.

"Well, why don't you go?"

"I'm too lazy to go myself."

"Then I'll go with you. All right?"

The children leaping up and taking each other by the hand, were lost from sight in the woods.

III

Zelik approached the barn where the storks had built their nest. He took the egg from Rachel, held it in his lips, and swiftly like a cat began to climb the straight wall. He grasped a jutting piece of wood, waited a little as if seeking balance, and threw his body on to the roof. The nest was made of an old wooden harrow. In the harrow lay a basket, filled with grass and twigs. The close odor of fish, toads, and chickens, struck Zelik in the face. Three large eggs lay in the nest. He took out one of them, replaced it with the goose-egg, and wanted to descend from the roof, when the two storks suddenly appeared and flew at him with wide-spread wings. Zelik barely had time to get down, but he was so frightened lest the storks attack him that he remained standing with the egg in both hands.

Rachel shrieked loudly.

"Zelik, jump down."

Zelik, crouched, covered his face with both hands, like one expecting a blow, and began to slide down the incline of the roof.

The he-stork, flying swiftly by, stretched his long neck and directed his sharp beak at Zelik's face. Zelik dodged the beak of the stork, caught the blow in his back, and fell from the roof like a stone. The egg broke and covered him with yellow liquid.

Rachel thought that Zelik was surely dead from the blow. She began to pinch herself from fear, fell to her knees before Zelik, embraced him with both hands, and began to kiss him and to cry.

"Zelik, my dear, does it hurt you much, tell me? It's all my fault. Why did I bring the egg?"

When Zelik recovered from the blow, he felt a sharp pain in his back, and remembered that the stork had picked at him. Rachel, when she saw blood on his coat, put her hands to her head.

"O, mama, blood."

She again dropped to her knees before Zelik and began to entreat.

"Zelik, my dear, come to us. Braina will put something on it. She won't tell anybody. You'll see. I beg you, Zelik, come."

She kissed him and began to cry again. "It's all my fault."

Zelik, seeing her cry, became really frightened. He forgot his pain, and stood up.

"Come, Rachel. We'll go down to the water. You'll wash off the blood. All right? Don't cry. It's nothing. I have had bigger holes in my head and they healed."

"Are you mad at me, Zelik?"

"No."

"You want us to be friends forever?"

"Of course."

"See, I love you so much," Rachel said, and bit hard into the flesh of the arm above the elbow. All her teeth left red marks on the skin.

They were silent. They walked over the dry branches that cracked under their feet, in the direction of the River.

Rachel, like a little mother, began to attend on Zelik. She took off his coat, then his shirt, forgetting that a girl must not look on a naked boy. She took her white apron, dipped it into the cold water, and washed Zelik's wound. Zelik lay on his stomach like a little wounded animal. He did not move. He was happy to know that Rachel was busy about him. When she had washed the wound, she removed the stains from the apron, wrung it out, put it on the wound, went with him into the bushes in the shade, and told him to lie down with his face in her lap, so that the wound should dry a little.

Zelik obeyed. He fell asleep almost at once.

At short intervals Rachel lifted the apron, and looked to see if the wound had dried. But the wound still ran blood. Her heart overflowed with sorrow, and she began to weep quietly. And thus, weeping with red, brimming eyes, Rachel nestled her little head among the leaves, and also fell asleep.

IV

The she-stork did not leave her nest the whole morning. She watched how her young pecked their way out of the shells.

The he-stork was upset. He flew about the nest uttering strange cries, every now and then fetching something to his mate, strutting swiftly above the nest with a shrunken neck almost hidden beneath his wings. He resembled a young man whose wife is giving birth to her first child.

The she-bird emitted a strange "Clia-clia." The he-bird sat down, spread his wings, and guarded the nest. For a moment he seemed to be confused and looked at his mate who had lowered her head in shame as if she were saying, "I swear I am not guilty." A little gosling rolled out of a broken egg-shell. The he-stork felt that all in him was trembling, and like a cuckold husband he threw himself at this mate, pecking her feathers with his beak. She lowered her head still more, moved closer to him and like a really guilty one, made no resistance. All in her seemed to say, "Go on beating me."

The he-stork picked the gosling up with his beak, caught it by the head, and threw it down from the barn top. He began to destroy the nest with his beak and legs, looking no longer at his mate. Then he nested awhile, and flew away.

The she-stork smoothed her feathers, and began to sharpen the point of her beak, knowing that she was lost, that "he" had flown to tell the flock about her sin.

She lifted one foot, began to sharpen her beak still harder against the harrow, and wept in her own way. She was sure that it was not her fault, that a misfortune had befallen

her, and she thought she would tell it to the elders of the flock. She would show them the two other children, real little storks, with red feet and red beaks. And she wept again.

Zelik and Rachel sat on the raft.

"You know, Rachel?"

"What?"

"From now on I'll be able to swim just like a duck."

"How?"

"I'll cut into my toes——"

"You mustn't do it, do you hear, Zelik? I swear, I'll always be mad at you, always!"

"Well, let me finish. Listen to me first."

"I won't let you anyway."

"I'll take the skins of some goose-feet, fasten them between my toes, and keep them there till they grow into me, and then——"

"And won't your toes bleed?" Rachel cut him short.

"Of course, they won't. Ofelo taught me to cut a finger with the sharpest knife so that no blood would flow. And her mother is a witch."

"But you are mad with Ofelo."

"Of course, I'm mad with her. You know, Rachel, Ofelo knows of a grass that if you lick it, you sleep a whole day and night. You don't believe me? I swear it."

"She does?"

They were silent for a while.

"Zelik, is it really true that Ofelo's mother walks in shoes made of the veins of men?"

"Of course, you know, Ofelo's mother can

turn into a straw and hide herself in the smallest crack. She is a real witch."

The Vistula rippled. The ripples widened into rings. The rings grew longer, swallowed each other and grew still larger and larger, and the erstwhile quiet Vistula, that had looked like a crystal mirror, grew dark and rigid.

A swallow fluttered by, and seeing other swallows in the water he dropped from on high, dipped his beak into the Vistula. The Vistula rippled again.

Zelik related that below the "black stone," in a glass palace lived Wanda the queen of Vistula. In the summer, during the great heat, when the Vistula grew shallow, Wanda and her sisters gathered on the stone and kidnapped little children. She had attempted to catch him three times but he knew a secret saying, which he uttered and that caused a fiery ring to grow between him and her, and she could not reach him.

"Zelik, why does Wanda need so many children?"

"Why does she need them? She kisses them till their souls leave their bodies, and then she eats their hearts."

The children saw a flock of storks settle on an island in the middle of the Vistula.

"They're going to have a wedding," Zelik said, turning to Rachel. "Come, we'll get there with the boat."

He unbound the boat from the raft. Rachel looked around to see if any of her folks noticed them, and sprang joyously into it.

Rachel saw the little crystal waves leap up,

swallow each other, and blend before her eyes. She became still happier, and gave a strange shriek.

They landed on the island, dragged the boat on to the shore, and lay down in the grass.

The storks sat in a wide semi-circle. Two old storks like two prominent citizens, walked in the center of the ring. The "he-stork" came flying, holding the dead gosling in his beak, and carried it to the old pair. "Here, look."

The old storks looked long at the gosling, smelled it, threw it around with their long necks, made some strange sounds and two storks rose and flew away.

Soon they came back with the "she-stork." The messengers with a "Clia-clia, clia-clia," told of her explanation.

The storks again became noisy and excited, broke their ring, pressed into one beap, and from far it seemed that a broadboned monster, with tens of agile heads stood in the middle of the Vistula, and cried "Clia-clia, clia-clia."

The storks surrounded the "she-stork." The mate approached her, poked her in the head, and then great long necks with open beaks flew at her from all sides, feathers whirled in the air, and the bird was torn to pieces.

It was late. Rachel sat and cried, knowing that she and Zelik were guilty of everything. Zelik lifted her.

"Come, Rachel. Let's go home."

They entered the boat. Heavy clouds suddenly rose from the Vistula, stood up like walls and all became complete darkness. A bolt of lightning lit up the whole river. Rachel be-

came confused. She saw nothing in the blinding light, forgot that she was in a boat, and jumped up. A thunder rolled, as if rocky hills were being sundered. A flood came down from heaven.

Rachel was no longer in the boat. Zelik threw off his coat, and searched for her, diving into the water. But she was not to be seen.

The Vistula stormed.

Black waves, like angry animals with foaming mouths stood up high and threatening, roared, and threw themselves at Zelik. And lightnings like fiery ribbons, blinded his eyes on all sides. The boat was already far from him. It drifted down the river. A wave covered Zelik, and he felt that he was growing lighter. He ceased to struggle, and saw a palace with green lights closing towards him. Wanda, surrounded by whitish lightning, hung in the air above him. She called him to her, showed him Rachel, sent lightning to him, and the flashes like long tongues became thinner and thinner. The lightnings tickled him, kissed him, burned him, and his mother stood over him, squeezed lemons into sugar, and put it into his mouth. And suddenly Wanda spread out her watery tresses. They became longer, enfolded him, and water poured on him from a thousand pipes, extinguishing the lightning flashes. He felt so well, so well. And he swam on.

—Translated by Jacob Robbins.

A TALE OF A HUNGRY MAN

DAVID PINSKI

Itsye had for two days in succession had nothing in his mouth; in other words, he had been hungering. But on the third day, for three brass buttons he wheedled the lunch out of a little Hebrew school pupil that studied in the school of his yard—two little buttered cakes--and swallowed them eagerly. Then he became angry. The cakes were a mere morsel to him, but now he had at least a little strength with which to feel anger, and was seized with an impulse to accomplish evil. His fingers itched with the desire. First of all he launched a wicked kick in the direction of Zhutshke, the little dog which the landlady of his house held dearer than her own children. Zhutshke ran off yelping with pain, but this was not enough for Itsye. He tore up a stone that had been frozen to the earth and with all his strength sent it flying after the dog. It did not strike the animal, however, but landed on the door of Simkin the lawyer's house. It struck with a resounding blow, and Itsye felt satisfied, for he wouldn't have cared had the stone struck Simkin or Simkin's wife on the head.

But with all this his hunger was not appeased in the slightest, nor was his seething heart calmed in the smallest degree. He waxed still angrier, for he felt that these were mere trifles, that he had accomplished nothing with them.

He walked through the gate, glanced up and down the street, and felt that he was an enemy to every passer-by, and especially to every one that rode. He cursed them with bitter oaths and would gladly, with his own hands, have executed all tortures upon them.

Another little pupil approached the gate; he was wrapped in a broad scarf and wore the large shoes of a grown-up person. He held his hands inside the scarf, and whether because he was indifferent or because it was too cold, did not remove them to wipe his nose, from which mucus leaked down to his mouth.

Out of his pocket peeped a crust of bread. Itsye was seized with a longing for it, but the appearance of the poor child restrained him. He sought, however, to convince himself that he was incensed against the child, even as he was against the whole world, and that he ought to give him a hard kick, as he had just done to Zhutshke. He seized the child by the nose, then struck him on the cap and scowled. "Slob, it's running into your mouth!" The child was frightened, brought his elbow up to his nose and ran off. But soon he turned back, looked at his unexpected enemy and began to cry, "Wicked Itsye! Itsye the bad man!" And he disappeared through the gate. Itsye did not even deign to look at him.

He leaned against the gate. Why? He did not himself know. At any rate, he was weary. Angry and exhausted. The two cakes had only excited him. Food, food! He could see before his eyes the piece of bread in the poor boy's torn pocket. That would have come in very

handy. He was sorry that he hadn't taken it away. A whole big piece of bread....

He leaned more heavily against the gate, not knowing why and not knowing what was to come, or what would result from his standing there. The cold grew intense, but Itsye did not feel it, for he was angry and paid no attention to it. Besides, he had no place of refuge. Up there in his garret it was still colder. Moreover, there was nobody there, and he would have none upon whom to vent his wrath.

He stood thinking of nothing. It was impossible for him to think. He no longer knew precisely that he was in a rage; it seemed to him that today he would work a very clever piece of malice. He knew nothing about dynamite; otherwise he would have thought unceasingly of bombs, and would have painted himself pictures of the whole city, the whole country, the world itself, being blown by him into atoms. But he gave no thought to any definite project. He was certain that he would do something malicious enough. He felt it.

Two laborers passed by and were conversing about hunting for a job. It flashed through his head that he would stop looking for work even if the employers starved to death! At the same time he felt that his seeking was all in vain. He would find no work today, any more than yesterday, or the day before, or the day before that, or the whole twenty-seven days in which he had been searching for employment.

In his mind's eye he could see "tomorrow," —a dragging, cloudy day, on which he would

be faint with hunger. But he did not care to think of tomorrow. Only "today"... Today he must accomplish something; then he would know what would come tomorrow, the day after, and all the other days. Wherefore he remained leaning against the gate and looked into the street with a cutting smile upon his pale lips and in his dull, weary eyes, without the trace of a thought in his head. He even ceased scolding and cursing.

All at once he tore himself away from the gate and began to walk. He gave no heed to direction. He lost his bearings, unknown to himself. He strode on, unaware that he was moving. His feet were like logs and he could scarcely lift them. He became soon aware that he was no longer at the gate, and that he was wandering about the street. Then it seemed to him that he had wished and resolved to take a little exercise. His feet must get warm. But he affected not to be troubled about his feet any more than about the cold itself, which pierced him to the very marrow.

He walked along slowly, cautiously, calmly. The street on which he was led at one end to the city-market and at the other to the municipal garden. He had no idea of whither he was headed, but the nearer he approached to the market the shriller and clearer became the noises from that vicinity. Then he realized the direction in which his feet were taking him, and again it seemed to him that this was exactly what he had desired and determined upon. This was the very spot for him to execute his plan of vengeance. He paused on the curb.

The great market-place seethed with 'shouting, gesticulating persons. The air resounded with the din of thousands of human beings. The clamorous despair of the wretched poor, the grunting indifference of the sated rich, the screeching impudence of the money-hungry,—all mingled here and rose above the heads of the multitude, deafening the ears of the unaccustomed spectator. About Itsye all manner of individuals were walking, hurrying, scampering, with and without bundles. Almost every passer-by touched him, jostled against him, but he stood there calm, motionless. It occurred to him that this in itself was good,—that in this manner alone he was doing harm. Yes, he must continue to stand here and obstruct everybody's passage! His eyes, however, darted about the square, as if seeking there just what form his vindictive ire should assume. They rested upon the bread-shops and the bank-stalls, laden with "Korah's wealth." And he began to contemplate how it would be if he made off with a packet of bank-notes....

A porter with a large case on his shoulders bumped against him, nearly pushing him over. He felt an intense pain in his back and came to himself. He turned red with anger.

"You plague, you! Where are your eyes?"

The porter mumbled something from under his burden and continued on his way with heavy steps.

Itsye, however, felt the pain and rubbed his back.

"I'll bury you together with the case, you piece of carrion-meat!"

The porter craned his neck from under his case and looked back at the shouting man. Itsye's appearance called forth little deference from the toiler; he stopped for a moment and eyed his opponent with scorn.

"Hold your mouth, or I'll stop it for you so that you'll be dumb forever. I'll show you what 'carrion-meat' means, you bloody dog!"

The porter went on his way, grumbling and cursing. Itsye muttered a few imprecations and turned his head in another direction.

"What have you planted yourself here for, in everybody's way?" he heard a surly voice exclaim behind him.

He looked around. Kaplan, the shopkeeper, was standing in the doorway of his shop, eyeing him angrily. He replied coarsely:

"What worry is that of yours?"

Kaplan grew excited.

"I'll soon show you what worry of mine it is!" And he sent the errand-boy after a policeman.

As he ran by Itsye the boy jeered, with mischievous eyes, "Just wait a moment! You'll soon have a good drubbing!"

Itsye spitefully refused to move. To hell with everybody!

Now then,—what was it he had been thinking of before? And his glances began to wander across the square and the faces of the people, as he tried to recall his previous thoughts. When he noticed the boy returning with a policeman he turned his head indifferently aside.

"What are you standing here for? Move on!"

Off with you!" commanded the guardian of order.

Itsye slowly faced about.

"Is this spot private property, what?"

"Move on, I tell you!"

Itsye resumed his former position.

"Move on!"

The official was now in an ugly mood and had raised his sabre.

Itsye felt that he must refuse to stir. But something moved his feet. It was the instinct that a policeman must be obeyed.

He went off. Back to his street. Slowly, scarcely moving his legs, without looking back at the official.

He was frozen through and through. It was as if he had no feet. As he approached the gate to his house he felt that it would be pleasant to lie down a while. This he felt against his will. He must remain in the street because he was filled with rage and must vent it in some vindictive deed. But his heavy, frozen limbs drew him to his attic, where it was frightfully cold, where the icy wind moaned and whistled. The wind was not so noisy here below. It seemed that his feet knew he would hunt up all sorts of old rags and wrap them around his frozen members.

So he allowed his feet to carry him along. On the way to the garret they overturned a slop-pail and stumbled across a cat. It was they, too, who opened the door of his room. The door flew back and struck against something soft. The soft object fell, and the feet had to step over a heap of tatters out of which

peered the parchment-yellow, wrinkled, peaked face of an old shrivelled-up woman.

"Wow—wow—wow!" she began to wail, hopelessly enmeshed in her rags. It was the deaf-and-dumb landlady of his lodgings.

He made no reply. The feet were already in bed.

* * *

He slept for a long time. It was already dark when the feet slipped down from the bed. At once he recollected that he was angry, and felt his ire course through him. But he was weary and weak. So weak, in fact, that he decided not to get up, but rather to lie there forever. "A piece of bread!" flitted through his mind. He could behold rows of well-provided houses, countless kitchens, heaps of bread-loaves. But he continued to lie there, because he did not know,—could not begin to know, how to get them.

At last an idea flashed upon him. "From the deaf-and-dumb old witch!"

He arose from the three-legged bed and walked into the landlady's room. The bundle of rags was seated at the table, before a small night-lamp that lacked a chimney, eating from a pot of water containing crumbled bits of hard bread.

He approached the bundle of rags and indicated with his fingers that he was very hungry and wished a piece of bread. She clutched the pot more tightly and began to bark savagely. This meant that she hadn't enough for herself, and that she didn't care to give him anything, anyway, since he had

struck her with the door before, throwing her over, and since he wasn't acting properly, not having paid his rouble and a half rent for the past two months.

He knew very well just what her barking signified, and eyed her as if deliberating what course to pursue. Quite cold-bloodedly he wrenched the pot from her grasp, pulled out a piece of bread and crammed it into his mouth. The tattered form seized him, with a frightful, wailing yelp, and drew the pot toward her. He raised it above her reach and continued to chew. The first bite had excited him. He began to eat faster, swallowing almost without chewing. The old woman barked and howled at the top of her voice, tugging at his arms. He thrust her away. She fell upon her knees, grasped his legs and with a wild gasping and snorting bit into them with her gums, in which stood only two side teeth. He pressed her with his knees to the floor and sat down upon her. She could no longer move.

Now he would eat in peace.

He stuck his fingers into the pot without finding anything. He almost yelled with fury. His heart began to bound wildly; his eyes sparkled. He must do something. He sprang to his feet, and cried out, wildly, "More bread, old witch!"

He shoved her with his foot, emptied the pot of water on her head and began to look for bread. He found nothing; there was nothing to be found. He continued his search, however. He overturned the old chest, scattered the bedclothes, broke the only chair. He be-

came furious, not knowing what he did. The old woman seized him, dragging him toward the door with terrified shrieks. With all his might he thrust her off. The old woman's head struck against the high oven; she groaned uncannily. Her moaning brought him to his senses. He was frightened, and held in his breath. He stepped toward her. Was she still alive? The aged landlady began to get up. He now breathed more freely and dashed out of the room.

He was exhausted, yet excited. He desired to weep,—to weep bitterly. He was thoroughly ashamed of the encounter with the deaf-and-dumb landlady. He had robbed her of her wretched supper and had come near killing her. And his hunger was now greater than ever. “A-a-ah!”

He pressed both his fists to his mouth and began to gnaw at them. The pain grew intense, yet he kept on gnawing. He wished to “feel his heart.”

The door opened and the old woman appeared. A narrow shaft of light shone over the dark steps, falling like a grey strip upon Itsye's shoulder. But the old woman did not see him, and she sent after the supposedly vanished fellow several infuriated screams, more cutting than the most devastating curses. Itsye shuddered, stopped chewing his hands and remained motionless, holding in his breath. The landlady returned to her room and locked the door.

“Locked out!” flashed through his mind at once. His head became warm. He tried to

consider what was now to be done, but he saw no prospects before him. He felt an impulse to batter down the door, enter the room, get into bed and lie there. He had already rolled his fists into a ball. But after striking the door a resounding blow, he ran down the stairs. Only when he had reached the bottom did he ask himself, "Why that blow?"

It was snowing and a strong wind was whistling and moaning. The cold went right through Itsye's bones; he began to tremble, and his teeth knocked together. He huddled up in his tattered cotton coat, from which hung patches, strips of lining and wadding. He groaned in despair and stepped back into the entrance of the house. He felt a tug at his heart, and was once more seized with a desire to weep, to weep.

"What will come of this? What?"

He could behold no answer. He would today be frozen to death or die of hunger.

"Oh, for something to eat! Food, food!"

He looked about. He was standing near a cellar, the door to which was protected by a heavy lock. He placed his hand upon the lock, with no thought of robbery. As he felt the cold iron, however, it occurred to him that it would be a good idea to break off the lock and obtain access to the cellar. He pulled at the lock. No. This was beyond his strength. He repeated the attempt, and at length summoned all his force and gave a violent wrench.

The lock merely made a loud noise; nothing else. He was intimidated by the knock.

He looked around and quickly deserted the entrance to the house.

Had he really desired to steal? And if he had succeeded in tearing the lock away, would he really have entered and committed theft? He could not believe this. He had been born into poverty; had been reared as an orphan in misery and ill-treatment, yet his hand had never been raised to another's property. "Scandal-raiser," they used to call him, and "wickedest of the wicked"; for he never was silent when wronged, and all were his enemies because of this vindictiveness. Yet these self-same persons admitted that you could leave heaps of gold with him in perfect security. And just now he had been on the point of stealing! That morning he had also thought of stealing. What? Would he really have stolen? And perhaps yes. Ah, he was so hungry! "Food, food, food!"

Again he surveyed the neighborhood. He was in the street! He had not even noticed it when he left the yard. What was he going to do in the street? Whither would he go? "Oh, for a bite!" But there was no sense in standing here in the street. He must walk. "Walk wherever my eyes lead me, until I fall—fall, and an end of me!"

Again his wrath returned. Anger against himself and the whole world. At once, however, he saw that he lacked the strength to be angry—that his heart was growing weaker. "Food, food, food!"

He staggered along, casting glances in every direction and knitting his brows so as to see

more clearly through the thickly falling snow. He had no notion of whither he was going, nor was he at all interested. He was moving so as not to remain on the same spot. He peered more intently than ever, although he felt that he would see nothing but large snowflakes. One thing he knew very well—that he wanted and must have something to eat, even if the world came to an end. "Food, food, food!" he groaned within him desperately.

He reached the municipal garden. The pleasure-spot was situated upon a high hill, at the foot of which flowed the broad, deep river. During the winter there was usually skating on the river, and above, in the garden, a crowd of curious onlookers. But now there was not a trace of human beings in the garden. Not even the lamps were visible through the thick snow. They illuminated only the space within a few paces of them. Itsye was at a loss whether to feel vexed or not at the absence of people. He did not look back, and continued on his way. He approached the top of the hill and looked down upon the frozen river. He could see nothing. There came to his ears the shrill blows of heavy iron. Moujiks were opening a hole in the ice. And in his weary thought he beheld a broad, deep hole down there, and he was drawn thither. The suggestion came to him to hurl himself down from the hill into the deep stream. He would raise no outcry; he would not call for help. He would drown himself quite silently. But he recognized that this was merely a thought: the important thing was that he felt

very weak and was ravenously hungry. "Food, food, food!"

He looked about, as if he would have liked to see something eatable in the garden. Before him was only the endlessly falling snow. Snow below him, snow on the bare trees, snow in the air. His legs bent beneath him—now, now he was about to fall. But he did not wish to fall. He desired something to eat, and gathering all his strength he continued his wanderings. Again he moved forward, not knowing whither. He walked along a deserted path, through drifts of snow that fell into his torn shoes—all alone, the only living creature in the dark, forsaken garden. He could neither hear nor see anything. He moved along because he had nowhere to go, and particularly because he wanted something to eat, eat, eat. He thought of nothing, nor could he think if he tried. Something was driving him on, and he continued on his way with the despairing, inner groan, "Food, food, food!"

He reached the square before the theater. The bright gleam of the electric lights brought him to his senses. He stopped. As he did so, he came near falling. He stumbled forward and leaned against the wall of a building. He felt that his shoes were filled with snow. This however, produced no effect whatever upon him. What did vex him was that he could scarcely stand on his feet, that his heart was fearfully weak and his desire for food persisted in growing. He would remain standing there. Whither else should he go? Here, at least, it was light, and soon he would see

people. Many people—rich, happy. And what of it if he *should* see the wealthy, sated crowd? He would beg alms. He would say that he had not eaten for three days.

Ask alms! He shuddered with repulsion at the idea. But he was so terribly hungry! He had been on the point of stealing. Which was better, stealing or begging? He leaned against the wall, threw his head back, looked with a dull glance into the snowy distance, and with his blunted mind, sought a reply.

The night watchman approached him and pushed him away.

"What are you doing here?"

Itsye scarcely moved. He could not raise his feet.

"Do you want to be arrested?"

Itsye nearly fell; he was greatly excited, but he composed himself and gathered all his strength in a desperate effort to walk off. Ouf! He could not feel his legs. Hunks of ice! He began to kick one foot against the other.

"Well! Get a move on! Faster, there!"

Itsye snarled through his clamped teeth.

"Can't you see I can barely move? Why do you chase me away? Better ask whether I'm not hungry!"

He crossed the street. Several stores were still open. Hadn't he better go in and beg alms? He halted before a window. He desired to take counsel with himself.

"I see you! I see you over there!" he heard the watchman shout.

He proceeded further along the street, to

the other end, where it was almost pitch dark. There he paused for a while to kick his feet again. Then he walked along. He made a circle around the theatre and came to a halt before the entrance. There were no policemen in sight. They were inside the lobby seeking shelter from the wind and storm. Itsye remained there, hopping now on one foot, now on the other. Without any definite thoughts, utterly purposeless. He remained there because it was light, because inside sat wealthy sated persons enjoying themselves! And he must stand outside, covered with snow, frozen, hungry, and would be joyful if he found a piece of bread! His anger began to return. And he recollected that in the morning he had desired to do something, to wreak vengeance Just what had it been? He wrinkled his forehead. Just what had he meant to do?

"Ah! Much I can think up in there, now!"

He cried this out with an intense self-scorn. He was terrified at the sound of his voice, and glanced at the large glass doors. Nobody was looking at him; then he had not been heard. Whereupon this talking to himself became pleasant. It afforded distraction. So he commenced to speak. Detached phrases—fragments of his weary, confused thoughts.

"I'll think up something, pah! With a knife.... Or set fire.... That's what I ought to.... That's something! Let them all roast alive! What am I standing here for? What am I waiting for? That wouldn't give me anything! They'd rather call the police! Kaplan—may the fires of hell seize him!"

He did not cease his chatter. And the more he spoke, the angrier he grew. He forgot his hunger, he now "felt" his heart. He cursed with imprecations as bitter as death and felt new life course through his veins. He cast all manner of accusations upon the audience inside, eating and drinking its fill and pursuing all manner of pleasures.

"To steal from those people and murder them is not a bit wrong!" he philosophised. He was now in a mood for anything at all, and would commit in absolute indifference whatever suggested itself. It seemed to him that his strength could cope with any task now—that it was a giant's strength.

The glass doors swung open. The gendarmes appeared, followed immediately by the crowd. Itsye remained calmly in his place. He did not even cease talking to himself. The gendarmes had not yet noticed him. They were busy with the sleighs. Itsye was therefore able to continue his conversation undisturbed.

"Here they are already!" he said. "They've had a good time and plenty to eat and drink, the dogs! In warm fur coats, arm in arm with their wives, or even with prostitutes...."

A few passers-by eyed the snow-covered vagabond.

"Drunk or crazy," remarked one of them. They went on their way. Itsye cried after them:

"You're drunk yourself! I'm not drunk, you curs! I'm hungry, you pimps! I robbed a poor old woman of her supper, you scamps!....I,

drunk! You curs! . . . I've been hunting work for a month, cholera seize you! Not a bite in my mouth for three days, you dogs! . . ."

A gendarme heard his voice and approached to discover who was shouting and cursing.

"What are you screaming for? Move!"

The officer gave him a violent push.

"What are you shoving about?" cried Itsye and he raised his hand against the officer. He felt that it would be a treat to deliver a slap,—a fiery slap. He waited for one more push.

The gendarme noticed his gesture.

"Ha, you Jewish 'phiz'!"

Itsye's hand descended. The blow resounded loudly. A crowd gathered. Itsye desired to repeat the act. He was now wild. He wished to strike about him, strangle persons, bite. But he received a hard blow upon the head. He grew dizzy and toppled over. Now he could feel feet upon him. He knew that he was being trampled upon, but he could not open his eyes, nor could he move a limb. Soon he was lifted and dragged somewhere. With blows across the back, the head and the stomach, and with the ugliest oaths. He could not protect himself. He could not even speak. Only rave and groan horribly.

Softer and weaker became the raving and the groaning, and at last he lay quiet, motionless. Dense darkness hovered over him, enveloped him, engulfed him. His eyes were closed, but he felt the darkness. Like a heavy load it pressed down upon him. He knew, in an obscure way, that he had struck somebody and had been beaten up badly in return. And

now he was quiet and peaceful, and he wondered at the peaceful feeling. He began to grope about with his hands, his eyes still closed. He struck against a hard, dusty floor. Where could he be? The question flew through his entire being in a most undistinguishable manner. With a great effort he raised his eyebrows. The dense gloom settled upon his open eyes. He could see nothing and his eyes shut heavily again. Once more he began to scrape about with his hands and opened his eyes. Wider, this time. Something dazzled him. Above, on the ceiling, shone a small gray light. It entered from the single window, which was built in high on the wall. Itsye looked first at the strip of light and then at the little window with the iron bars. He eyed it for a long time. As one who has awaked from a dream and has not yet come to himself.

Suddenly the blood rushed to his head. He sat up quickly. He recognized the bars and now realized that he was in jail. They had given him a good drubbing and had thrown him into a dark hole. He became strangely warm. In a moment's time he foresaw everything that awaited him; the blows that were yet in store,—the trial and the sentence,—prison and convict labor. He groaned in deep despair. Ah! And now he felt that his head pained excruciatingly; his face and his whole body, likewise. He hastened to feel his head and his face. His hat was gone. His hair was moist and sticky. He touched an open wound. With his fingers he followed the sticky trail. Blood everywhere. On his head, all over his face and on his bare chest.

He had a desire to weep at his great misery and boundless despair.

"Father!" he wished to cry, and "Mother, dear!" and "God!" Words that he had rarely used; beings he had never known. His heart contracted bitterly and he lay with his face to the floor; his body shook convulsively with his deep lamentation.

For the first time in his life was he weeping so. His was a bitter nature, and as often as life had brought him tears he had been able always to swallow them. He knew that his tears would soften nobody,—that they would only make him ridiculous. They would mock him as a soft-hearted fool, and that must never be. With teeth clenched together this wretched orphan had gone through life in eternal hostility to all about him. His eyes had been often suffused with blood, but never with tears.

Now, however, he neither could nor desired to hold them back. He wept until the tears refused to come. Then he was overcome by a fainting sensation, and he thought that death was near. It would come to him just as he lay there. He stretched himself out, closed his eyes and waited for death. To lie thus, to fall asleep forever and cease to be. To be liberated once for all from the desolate days behind him and from the misery ahead.

He yearned for death.

"Ah, to die!"

Before his sight there began to float dead bodies that he had seen during his life. Such he desired now to become. Then he beheld before him the hanging form of water-carrier

Kirillo. All at once he sat up. A certain thought had raised him: he, too, would hang himself. This waiting for death would not do. He would not die so soon, if he waited. He peered into the thick darkness and thought. The impression of his whole life rose before him. Not a single day of happiness; not a moment of rest. Years of unceasing care and of constant struggle, of laborious toil and frequent hunger. And the future threatened still worse. As black as the dense gloom about him. Long years of incarceration, in the prisoners' ranks, and then—hunger once more.

He raised his eyes to the iron bars of the window and felt the thick rope by which his trousers were held in place. Then he looked around and cocked his ear. Was anybody there? He heard no sound. He could scarcely lift himself up. His legs barely sustained him and he was so dizzy. He reached out to the wall and leaned for a moment against it. Then, with soft step, he investigated the room, groping about with hands outstretched. Nobody was there. He had frightened some mice and could hear the patter of their retreating paws. He stopped at the window and stretched his arms upward. He could not reach the bars. In one of the corners, however, there was a bench, against which he had stumbled as he groped about the cell. With difficulty he dragged it over to the window. The effort so weakened him that he was forced to sit down. Slowly he untied the rope around his trousers. He began to fashion a noose, lapsing into thought as he did so. Once more he looked

back upon the wretched past and forward into the dark future. Again he could see not a ray of light neither behind nor before. With teeth tightly clamped he made the knot and cursed life, and his heart seethed with bitter hatred for all mankind. With the self-same noose that he was now making, how gladly would he have encircled the necks of every human being and strangled the whole world. So, and so, and so!

The noose had been ready for a long time, yet he still sat meditating. He cursed and berated humanity, calling down upon it all manner of misfortune. Ah, how gladly he would revenge himself upon them!

Gradually one thing became clear to him. His death in itself would be a good vengeance. When day should come, and they would prepare to resume their ill-treatment of him, they would find him dead. Ba-a-a! A plague upon all of them! Good-by, Itsye! No more Itsye! No more Itsye to oppress, to persecute, to abandon to starvation! They would stand before his corpse like whipped curs, crestfallen, and would vent their intense disappointment in a vile oath. Ah, that was a precious thought!

He sprang hastily to his feet, jumped upon the chair, reached to the bars and tied the rope around them. His hands trembled; he shook with fever. He poked his head into the noose and kicked over the bench.

And as the rope tightened he was seized with a desire to laugh. To laugh like a conqueror,

like a master. But his eyes began to bulge out, his tongue protruded, and his face turned a pale blue.

But the protruding tongue still mocked.

"Ba-a! Good-bye, Itsye! No more Itsye!...."

—Translated by Isaac Goldberg.

A STRANGE CLIMATE

SHOLOM ASCH

Dr. Lazarovitch came home from the hospital in the evening, locked himself in his cabinet, as his custom was of late, and remained alone till supper. The servant had already knocked at the door several times, calling him to eat. The doctor gave vent to the usual grunt that meant he would soon come out, and remained locked in his cabinet. But this time he was not let alone as usual. From the next room was heard his wife, Anna Isakovna's, soft, weak voice, saying: "Boris, we are waiting." The voice woke the doctor from his day-dream. He felt as if he heard a strange, unusual sound.

For more than a year, ever since his oldest son, Mikhail, had gone to Moscow, and had been admitted to the faculty of medicine in the university, Dr. Lazarovitch tried to avoid his family. The family consisted, besides his oldest son, of his wife Anna Isakovna, who was always sick (and whom he saw seldom, anyhow), of a daughter, Jeyna, and of a boy, Solomon, who attended the fifth grade of Gymnasium, and whom he loved very much. The doctor avoided his home, trying to be there as little as possible. And when he did come home from the hospital, he always locked himself in his cabinet, as if he were working. But to tell the truth, he did not work. He had not held a book in his hands since he left the University. He thought of his oldest son, who had

gone to Moscow, and had entered the University through the good offices of the doctor's good friend, Vasili Ivanovitch, the president of a District Court. Dr. Lazarovitch knew, as well as the rest of the family, that his son had not been admitted through any good offices. The "good offices" were mentioned only before other people. Mikhail had adopted Christianity. Though no one spoke of it, and the family never mentioned it, yet Dr. Lazarovitch had begun to feel lonely since that time, and used to sit whole nights locked up in his cabinet. And when, after two hours he left his room, he would find the table deserted, and laid for one. His whole family had become very serious, each being occupied with his own concerns, and Ana Isakovna went to bed very early, as was her custom. The doctor would thoughtfully and hurriedly finish his meal, go back to his cabinet, take up an old "Ryech," and bury himself in a year-old speech of a Constitutional Democrat regarding the Budget.

It was his custom to fall asleep over the speech. Sometimes he would not awake until morning. Sometimes the old servant who had been with him many years would come in and wake him. Then he would undress and throw himself on a lounge that stood in the corner, on which he examined patients in the daytime, and above which hung an old magazine reproduction of Rembrandt's "School of Anatomy."

Because of this, the doctor was so much surprised when he heard his wife calling him. He understood that something new must have happened, and he was afraid of this new thing. When he came out of his cabinet he found his

family waiting for him at the table. This was so new to him that he grew glad and thought to himself that it was a very good thing to eat together with his children. But in his heart of hearts he was afraid of the sudden innovation. He was too nervous to wait long, so he asked as soon as he sat down: "What has happened?"

The children looked at each other, and remained silent. Anna Isakovna, who felt better than usually, answered: "Nothing has happened."

At the silence that reigned at the table, the doctor became still more excited. He cried that something must have happened; that they ought not torture him, but tell him at once. Anna Isakovna answered him as if imparting a great sorrow: "Mikhail writes that he is coming home for Passover."

The doctor grew silent. The rest were silent also, as if a dead man were in the house.

That night the doctor did not fall asleep over the "Ryech." He was thinking of himself and his son. Truth to say, he did not understand why Mikhail's apostasy had made such an impression on him. Neither he nor his had ever been religious Jews. He himself remembered very little of his religion. Passover and Yom Kippur were to him merely vague memories of childhood. His father, a storekeeper in a little town, had been a pious Jew. But since he had left the town in his youth going to study in Moscow, he had not seen his father and had lost track of the holidays. Anna Isakovna, with whom he had become acquainted in Moscow, and whom he had married there, also knew

nothing of Jewish holidays. And his children were reared like the children of so many parents in his circumstances, without any traditions. They lived according to customs and holidays of his Gentile neighbors. And naturally, Mikhail grew up ripe for Christianity. He was able, and from the fifth grade on he began to show an exceptional faculty for mathematics. When he began to study in earnest, no one of the family had the slightest doubt that Mikhail, in order to avoid the obstacles that lay between himself and his career, would have to adopt Christianity. The father, the mother, and Mikhail himself, had always thought so, though they never said a word about it. Then, why did it torture him so, now that Mikhail had already done it? What new thing was it that was waking in him, making him a stranger in his own house?

The doctor had thought much about this in the last days, trying to revive the memories of his own lost years to the utmost of his powers. But it was hard. When he began to think of them he would grow tired. His broad-boned body grew heavy and he became sleepy, for in the twenty-three years that he had spent in the provincial town within the Pale, he had forgotten how to think. Once upon a time, like other students of his age, he had been an idealist. He would finish his studies, he then thought, and go to the people. He would establish himself in some out-of-the-way village, there to heal the peasants and their wives and teach the little boys to read and write, for many students talked of that at the time. But when Dr. Lazarovitch was graduated he did not

go to any out-of-the-way village. He fell in love with Anna Isakovna, a daughter of Director Solomon. Solomon, an old, worked-out factory invalid, who had four daughters, was often visited by the Jewish students in Moscow. The girls played the piano, and the Director's home was aristocratic. The lackey, an old Gentile, served at the table in gloves, though there was not much to serve. The gloved lackey and the piano-playing made a deep impression on Dr. Lazarovitch, and to his share fell the weakest and ugliest of the Director's daughters, Anna.

But as soon as he married the aristocrat he forgot all his ideals. He went with his wife, who began to ail shortly after the wedding to a town in the Jewish Pale, where Director Solomon had many relatives and acquaintances. Here he began to build up a practice. This partly meant that even in the Pale one could do much, that ideals are necessary not only in the village, but also in the town. But soon the doctor became acquainted with the intellectuals of the town, with the druggist and the President of the Court, and spent most of his nights at the club, with him, playing cards. He tried to avoid being at home. He did not love his wife over much after she began to ail, but this did not prevent his having five children with her, two of which had been still-born; the other three had grown up almost without his knowledge, till his card-playing had been interrupted by the apostasy of Mikhail.

Dr. Lazarovitch became more and more restless as the time of his son's arrival from Moscow approached. The entire house lapsed into

silence. All seemed afraid of something. The doctor began to feel like a stranger in his own house, and could not find a place for himself anywhere. He ceased to go to the club, and could no longer sit over the "Ryech" in his cabinet. First it seemed to him that he was restless because he was unused to things, and was afraid of the new event in his home life. As soon as he would get used to the fact that his son was a Christian, and the town would know of it, and all would cease to talk of it at last, he too, would become quiet, and his life would resume its natural course. But soon he realized that his restlessness was not due to any *strange* circumstances, but lay much deeper. He was afraid of something, and did not know the cause. He said a thousand times to himself that nothing had happened, that his son's apostasy had changed neither himself nor his son. He himself was not so religious and fanatical as to believe that his son's change of religion should have a deeper meaning, because, in truth, neither he nor his son believed in God. So how could his son's outer metamorphosis change his inner psychological condition? And again, would it pay the able young man to give up his career, his abilities, his future, all for the sake of a religious superstition? Had not Mikhail acted logically when he removed once and for all the obstacles that barricaded the path of his future? But all these explanations could bring the doctor no rest. He felt that something more than a mere outward change had taken place; that a wall stood between him and his son; that it divided one generation from the other; that his son was

not a continuation of himself, but that something ended in his own self, and something new had begun in his son; that they already belonged to two different worlds. And he was afraid and restless when he contemplated the wall that stood between them.

Two days before Passover, Mikhail came home. The doctor could not see him. He was afraid to meet him face to face. He would run about among his patients and come home late at night, and when in the mornings he heard his son's voice in the next room he would tremble. He would look through a crack in the door and try to see how the boy looked. But his son had not changed at all. The same childish face with its familiar childish eyes which always touched the doctor's fathering heart. The doctor wondered that his son had not at all changed after baptism. He still looked exactly the same. But the doctor was afraid of him.

Throughout the time Mikhail was at home the house seemed dead. The usual noise of the children on their arrival from school was heard no longer. The children, who always walked on tiptoe now, could not be heard in the next room. They sat reading, each in a different corner, as if they were ashamed to look at each other. The silence strained the doctor's nerves still more. He wanted to go to the children many times, and play with them, as he used to do when they were small. But as soon as he saw Mikhail through the keyhole, he grew frightened and restrained himself.

And yet the apostate touched his heart more than the others. It seemed to him that the boy

looked weaker and sadder since he had become a Christian, and the doctor began to pity him. He had never felt so near to any of his children before. He was glad and yet sorry that he felt so toward his son. Once he saw him through a window reading in a corner of the room, dressed in the blue uniform that fitted him but poorly. The boy felt strange in the house, and was afraid to talk loud. His face was pale. In his eyes and about his lips lay the shadow of a great grief like that which lingers about a girl who has lost her innocence. The doctor noticed it and a wave of pity swept over him for the child who was inaugurating his career in such a sin. He could not restrain himself, walked into the room, approached the boy, laid his wide, thick hand on the weak, childish shoulders, and looked into Mikhail's eyes.

"Mikhail, how do you feel?"

The boy trembled. At sight of his father he grew pale, and confusedly and involuntarily pressing himself to his father, cried: "Papa." But he soon reminded himself of something, and remained standing, silent and shamefaced. "How did you enter the University?" Dr. Lazarovitch asked roughly, and wiped his thick face with a broad hand.

The boy was silent for a moment. At last he viciously bit his thin pale lips and answered: "I didn't know you would take it like this."

The father was silent.

In a minute the boy again said:

"If you want me to, I will leave the University, and become a Jew again. Do you think I liked to do it?"

"It is unnecessary," the father sternly answered.

"Why?" the boy asked.

The doctor moved closer to the boy, looked straight in his eyes, with a moody, sinister glance, and said: "We aren't talking of religion. You know I am not religious. We are discussing a principle. And you have denied that principle once. What would the good be in your becoming a Jew again? You can't change what you have done. Just like a girl who has lost her honor—she can't regain it. Understand?"

The doctor seized the boy's head and kissed him, perhaps for the first time in his life. Then he left the room.

A few days later the doctor heard another bit of news: Joseph Kalmanovitch, Mikhail's schoolmate, had also turned Christian. It was an open secret that Joseph was in love with Jenya. The town considered them already engaged. The doctor waited till the young man came to his house to see how his daughter would treat him. In a few days the doctor found the young man in his house, and Jenya went out with him as if nothing had happened. Joseph had been treated as usual. The doctor began to wonder and it occurred to him that after all, it was only he who was so reactionary and superstitious that apostasy made too deep an impression on him. Yet the doctor could not understand how his daughter could receive the young man after Mikhail's apostasy, and how Anna Isakovna bore the thing so patiently. He promised himself to talk to his

daughter. She told him clearly that she did not care whether her husband was a Jew or a Christian. She loved the man. If her father objected to a marriage between them, she would live with Joseph anyway. It was only then that his situation grew clear in the doctor's eyes. His children were leaving his house and his religion, and he himself would remain in his old age lost among strange beliefs and perhaps be supported by his children, and bring up strange grandchildren. And maybe his children would baptize him before death so that he should lie in the graveyard together with them. This woke the doctor from his apathetic condition, and he resolved to take action.

At the same time the doctor persuaded himself that he had become religious, and he would seek out small groups that congregated to pray at certain places and visit them between evening prayers. But he could not deceive himself. The prayers of the common, every-day Jews who ran into the small synagogue to free themselves for an hour from a day's work, and to give God His due, desirous of getting through with their duties as soon as they could, made no impression on him at all. He did not understand the prayers. He did not understand the grimaces they made, and their continued whining and shaking struck him as being wild. Yet he did not lose hope, and was inwardly sure that somewhere there did exist a great, strong Judaism, a Judaism that repaid the burdens borne for its sake, a Judaism that gave Jews strength to bear suffering and still remain Jews—and it was his to seek out

that Judaism which would repay him for the happiness lost in his children.

He tried to observe the Jewish holidays in his home. He himself did not know much about them. He remembered nothing about them, and appeared comical in his own eyes when he went out on the street to buy Kosher meat, or bread, or matzoth and bring it home. Yet the people in the house had taken it all very seriously; on Passover the matzoth were placed on a serving dish, put on the table, and all were afraid even to touch it. They all tried to be as serious about it as was he himself—but he knew that it was a farce. No one in the house knew anything about the holidays. The holidays they kept were the holidays of their neighbors. Where any part of the town celebrated, the doctor's house celebrated with it—Easter with the Russians, Christmas with the Catholics, but of their own holidays they knew nothing. Because of this it was rather comical that he should all of a sudden try to celebrate their “own” holidays.

Mainly he did it for his fourteen-year-old son, Solomon, who caused him more unrest than all the others. He knew that the boy suffered, that he was of a different make-up than the other children. It had been very hard to make it possible for the boy to enter the gymnasium. It was at a time when hate toward Jews was already raging among their Gentile neighbors, and was more than ever in style. The boy was forced to suffer much at the hands of his Gentile schoolmates. Often, when he came home from school, his wet, frightened eyes seemed

to ask the terrible question: "Why?" In the beginning, when he was yet a child, he asked his father: "Why did the Jews do that?" He was tortured so at school, but when the doctor was unable to give him a clear, true answer, he ceased to ask the question. Soon the child knew the full taste of being a Jew; he grew used to it, and bore it like a grown-up, with humility and patience. He asked no more questions, and it was seen that he withdrew further and further into himself. He had grown very much in the few years he spent in the gymnasium. He read serious books, and his forehead was already wrinkled. He was quiet, and a sneering smile towards everything and everybody lingered about his lips—the smile of the suffering Jew towards the rest of the world. The doctor was more ashamed of himself before the boy than before his other children, and felt that he must do something to change the situation. He knew the responsibility he carried in the eyes of the child; that it was his to take care that this boy too did not become an apostate. This drove him to think of some practical remedy. He often wanted to speak to the youngest son about the older one's apostasy, but he could not. He was afraid to hear the truth from him—a thing he had heard from none heretofore—that the fact that Mikhail turned Christian was due more to himself than to Mikhail. He did nothing to prevent his son from changing faith. He already read the answer in the sneering smile that hung on the boy's lips, and even more, in that the boy avoided the house more than he himself did. He spent most of his time at a schoolmate's and

was rarely seen in the house. Since the oldest brother had become a Christian he had avoided the house still more.

In this avoidance of the house the doctor saw a personal insult to himself. "The child avoids me," he said to himself. This made him feel still worse and he would think: "Why does he avoid me?" And once when he was told that Solomon had not come home for two nights (those were the first nights after the arrival of the apostate), the doctor sought the boy out at his friend's and spoke to him:

"Why don't you come home? Why do you run from the house?"

"I run from the house? It is you, father, who runs from the house," the boy answered boldly.

In the answer the doctor heard the whole inner truth—that he was lonely and avoided the house which he had built up; in this answer he heard the whole poverty, the whole forlornness of the situation in which he found himself, and he ceased to trouble his son with further questions.

The doctor began to take great interest in what was going on among the Jews. He read Russo-Jewish newspapers, thought much of Jewish interests, and found that a new Jewish life was beginning in Palestine, that Jews were emigrating there, and becoming farmers; that there was hope of a Jewish state being founded, where Judaism could develop freely and frankly to a strong and rich fruition. Palestine awoke in the doctor the memories of his childhood years, of his father, the storekeeper in a little town. He began to remember the Jewish holidays that his mother had always kept;—the

Jewish Sabbath, when she lit candles; the congregation in which he had prayed; the Jewish Passover, when all in the house was so clean, and the family gathered at the Seder. It seemed to him that all this was closely related to Palestine; that it came from Palestine. And there, in the new Palestine this all would show itself stronger and freer, and the greater Judaism would begin to develop. His eyes were suddenly opened and he beheld in Palestine the great Jewish hope, so great, so holy, that repaid Jews for their suffering, that gave Jews the courage and the strength to bear all pain and insult for its sake. Palestine gave compensation for all. He remembered, as in a dream, the Bible and the pictures in the Bible, and his father. The pious storekeeper's life suddenly grew more interesting to him. He saw a certain relationship between his father, the poor, forlorn Jew in his little home town, and the heroes of the Bible. It was Palestine that bound them together. His father, the storekeeper, came from the same land that knew Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He loved the same life they loved, and had the same duties and customs they had. But here, in exile, where he was oppressed he could not live like the patriarchs, the tillers of the soil, the shepherds. Here he had but the Sabbath and the Passover that the Patriarchs had; but there, in the land of the patriarchs, the Jews lead a patriarchal life; they till the soil themselves; they guard the sheep themselves, and live in godly piety. There Judaism shows itself in its full richness and greatness, only there can one understand what a moral, religious people the Jews are and

how clean and simple is the life they lead—there the Jewish holidays are celebrated in all their holiness. There he would see with the same eyes and feel with the same emotions the Jewish Passover, the Jewish Sabbath, the Jewish holiday, as long ago, when he was a child and lived in the house of his father and mother.

The doctor hid deep in his heart the secret that he had found Palestine as one hides a great treasure. He was afraid to confide it to his family. He became more restful and sure of himself. He no longer sat locked up in his cabinet whole nights long. He went no longer to the club; he began to eat together with his children; he even became very kind to his wife. A sort of hidden joy smiled out of his eyes, and no one knew what it was, just as no one knew the cause of the doctor's sudden change of habits.

He wanted to share his secret with Solomon—the boy would understand the happiness the doctor had found, and he needed it as much as the doctor himself. This would be good for the child, even heal him, the doctor thought—and why not go there with the child after all? He resolved to speak to Solomon about it. And as his custom was not leave anything undone till tomorrow, he wanted to speak at once, and entered the room where the boy sat over a book preparing his lesson. Without much ado, he patted the boy on the shoulder and said to him:

“Solomon, what do you think of Palestine?”

The boy opened wide his eyes and looked at the doctor in wonder.

“What made you think of this, papa?”

"Why not?"

It was soon seen that the boy had been interested in Palestine for a long time. He was organizing a student's Zionist Circle and knew of all that was going on in Palestine, even to the name of all the Jewish colonies. The father was beside himself with joy, and continued to pat the boy's shoulders.

"Would you like to go with me to Palestine?"

The boy looked at him in wonder.

"Do you really mean it, papa?"

"Of course, Solomon, of course. Don't you see that I am being stifled here? What have I got here?"—The doctor wanted to get rid of all that had tortured him of late. He soon restrained himself, however, and ended his words, half-laughingly:

"Of course, of course, Solomon. The Jews there are great, fine—That is the place for Jewish life." The doctor grew excited. "And you will go with me?"

"Of course I will go with you," the child answered.

"Even if mama and the older children remain here?"

"Let them remain if they like this place better," the child replied. "I want to be there where Jews are equal to others; where Jews are free."

"Where Jews are free!" The doctor muttered as if to himself. "Good, good, Solomon. Let them remain, let them remain, if they feel at ease here." The doctor was struggling with something in himself. He swiftly disengaged himself from the boy and left the house, fearing that tears would gush from his eyes,—his

old, weary eyes, which sat in a heavy, sleepy body overgrown with so much fat that it seemed his heart could never be reached,—and yet....

From then on the father and the son found themselves in the strange house. They felt themselves richer and freer than the others, and looked at the mother, the sister, and the apostate, with pity. They would sit till midnight over a map of Palestine. Solomon would show where the Jewish colonies lay and what they were called; they had even begun to study Hebrew. The doctor gave it up after the second lesson—his head was too old to learn anything now. But not Solomon. When Solomon spoke of the new life, when father and son dreamed of Palestine, the old doctor's heart grew glad, his great body became lighter, and he felt that things were as once upon a time, when he lived with his father, the storekeeper—once, in his childhood years....

One fine evening the doctor called together his family, and tried to deliver a long speech. He did not succeed. At the last moment, when all were solemnly assembled, he entered the room, struck the table with his fist and cried in a voice not altogether calm, "Who will go with me to Palestine?" When they looked at him in wonder, he turned to his sick wife whom he almost killed with his loud voice and his swift, unusual movements. "Do you want to go to Palestine with me, or to remain with your Gentile children?" The wife looked at him with fear in her eyes, and stammered: "I don't know what you want of me. Where my children stay, I will stay also."

"Good, good," the doctor roared. "Stay wherever you want to. I will sell my property and separate from you. I and Solomon go to Palestine."

At first they thought that it was a fit of anger on his part,—a thing that had taken place often during the last days,—and that he would quiet down. But they soon realized that he was in earnest. He ceased to occupy himself with his practice, and visited the brokers trying to sell the house. He succeeded in selling it for a very small sum.

Bidding farewell to none but Solomon, he left for Palestine to seek rest for them both in the new home of the Jews.

A few weeks later, on a fine morning. Dr. Lazarovitch came back home. Shamefacedly he stole into his house, ashamed to show himself to his wife and children. They thought that he had come to take Solomon and go away again. But they saw him resume his old practice. He was very quiet and even more reserved than before. They did not ask him where he had been nor what he had done.

He felt the questioning gaze of Solomon directed at him. The boy asked him nothing, but seeing that his father was practising again, he lost heart, and began to avoid the house as he had done after the apostasy of Mikhail. The doctor felt guilty in respect to the boy, and avoided all conversation with him. Each day the boy became paler and more self-centered.

Once the doctor suddenly called him into his cabinet. The boy was ghastly, and one could hear his heart beat. He was ashamed to look his father straight in the eyes.

"I couldn't remain there. You understand, Solomon?" The father began quietly. "It was not what I expected. I thought it altogether different, altogether different. But it was not what I expected."

The boy lifted his eyes, and looked at his father. His look made the doctor nervous. He forgot what he wanted to say to the boy regarding his return, and began talking in a shrill, nervous voice.

"It is too hot there. Not our climate. I couldn't acclimatize myself there. I'm too old. You—perhaps—you are young, you might do it."

The boy lifted his eyes again, and now it seemed to the doctor that he saw a vague smile on the pale, cracked lips of his son, as if an older, experienced man were looking at a boy. The doctor cried still more angrily.

"What are you smiling at? Understand, I could not. Understand? I thought Palestine a Jewish kingdom. I would find there what I had when I was a child. A Sabbath. Holiday. In one word, a Jewish kingdom. With a great Jewish life. Perhaps one is growing there. But I'm too old to grow with it. I needed ripe fruit. Understand? Ripe fruit. And there is none there. Everything is green, poor. I felt like a stranger, a man from another climate. Understand? Another climate. You feel like a strange plant in another climate."

"Papa, it is not the climate that is to blame, but the plant."

"Perhaps the plant. Too old. But there is nothing to laugh at."

The boy pitied the man and said. "But papa, I'm not laughing. Who says I'm laughing?"

"You aren't laughing? Thanks. And I tell you that I gave up my ideal because it is too hot there. And if you want to, go ahead and laugh at it, laugh at a sixty-five-year-old jackass who is your father, who could not acclimatize himself in a strange climate because it was too warm. Laugh at it if you want to," Dr. Lazarovitch yelled.

Two large tears shone in the boy's eyes, and swiftly, without a single word, he left the room.

Since then both father and son avoid each other, and when they meet they are ashamed to look into each other's eyes.

Translated by Jacob Robbins.

A GAME

ABRAHAM RAISIN

Reaction, like a black vulture, had spread its wings over all that had lived and struggled. The best and bravest of the revolutionary spirits lost their courage and many were forced to wander forth, to escape to foreign lands, some with the hope of coming back in better and more tolerant times, others in doubt and despair.

Among the latter was Chayim Grossman, who from his twentieth to his thirtieth year, had worked in the movement. More than one barricade had he thrown up in Warsaw's streets, more than one revolutionists' banner had he waved from its house tops, and not a few times had he exposed himself to the peril of the bullets. But always his courage and his faith in the holy cause had helped him to come forth from the battle, safe in body and undaunted in spirit.

But at last even he lost courage, and as he reviewed his past activities, for which hanging itself were little punishment indeed, he was overcome by terror. Every night in his dreams there would appear hangmen, in red garb, laughing loudly at him through grinning teeth, and they would drag him somewhere up a high scaffold . . . He would be forced to crawl and climb, upward, upward, until he reached the top, which was frightfully high. And now he

would fall over the edge, and on waking would find himself bathed in a cold sweat, while his terror was greater than ever.

Shadow-like, he slunk through the "peaceful" streets, trembling at sight of every officer and beholding in every civilian—a spy . . .

There was only one course left—to escape. But strangely enough, the selfsame Grossman who during his ten years' service in the movement had stolen across the border time and again, now developed a sudden fear at the notion of crossing the boundary-line with the same trustworthy agents as heretofore. And when his more intimate friends, also former fighters for the cause, would ask him, "Chayim, why do you delay your escape?" he would reply dispiritedly, "I tremble at thought of the border. They're watching very closely now."

And of all these friends, once upon a time leaders in the revolution, not one would attempt to give him the courage to cross in the old way. This disheartened Chayim all the more, and like a caged beast he paced back and forth, a solitary shadow in the great city of Warsaw, seeking some avenue of escape from his danger . . .

One day, walking thus engrossed in thought through the Saxon Gardens, where at every turn a gendarme was encountered, Chayim came face to face with Henich, the son of wealthy parents, who had, however, been very active in the days of the revolution and had been very friendly towards Chayim. Henich took him to a secluded spot and whispered to

him, "Chayim, do you want to leave the country in the regular, legal manner?"

"Do you need to ask that?" replied Chayim quickly.

"Well, just listen. My sister Eda is about to leave for Berlin, to meet her husband, Sandrovitch. The passport is made out in the name of both of them, but he left earlier than he expected . . . so that you can travel with the passport, as her husband"

There flashed upon Chayim's memory the black eyes and the bewitching countenance of Eda, whom he had known well and with whom, in the days of the revolution, he had spoken only of matters connected with the struggle. Now, learning that she was already married, he felt a queer twinge at his heart, and growing pale with emotion, he answered quickly, "Yes, certainly, I'll go as her husband." Then noticing that Henich eyed him suspiciously, he added: "I'll avoid capture."

Henich, being an amiable sort of chap, slapped him on the back, "You—captured. That doesn't worry us at all!" he exclaimed.

Then, after having made arrangements for leaving in about a week, they separated.

That week went by as slowly as a year for Chayim. But not because he was so eager to leave Warsaw and its terrors behind; rather because of his desire to travel as the husband of dear, beautiful Eda. The make-believe relationship began to take on for him a most serious aspect, and as he lay in his room, which was situated in a remote section of the town, he conjured up the pretty face of

Sandrovitch's young wife Eda, who would soon be under his own personal care. A trembling, new-borne longing took possession of his heart . . .

Boruch Sandrovitch—Boruch Sandrovitch. He repeated the other man's name over and over again, so as not to betray himself at the border. And so, muttering the name countless times during the week he began to feel that from now on he was no longer Chayim Grossman, former revolutionist, but Boruch Sandrovitch, a student of Berlin University, a fair-haired fellow of twenty-five, whom the beautiful Eda loved to distraction . . .

"Well, here is your wife!" Eda's father, a tall, broad-boned Jew, with a patriarchal beard, and gold-rimmed spectacles on his aristocratic nose, turned to Chayim, who, at the words, was overcome by a sensation of sweet warmth that suffused his entire being. He stole a bashful glance at the slender Eda, who made a pretty picture as she stood there in her traveling clothes, smiling sweetly at him.

"Take good care of her," added Eda's mother, a woman of some fifty years, with large eyes and dressed in black.

"She'll be as precious as the apple of my eye," blurted Chayim fervently, and of a sudden blushed at the impassioned tones of his promise.

"And be sure not to forget that you're Boruch Sandrovitch," admonished Eda, beaming at him with the same sweet, friendly smile.

"I'll remember that only too well," exploded Chayim, with the same passion as before.

"Here is the passport; I am now in your hands," declared Eda, giving him the book.

Chayim placed it carefully in his pocket, and gazing at Eda most eloquently he managed to exclaim: "This is a most pleasant charge." And immediately he regretted his words.

It was three hours' ride to the border. Chayim sat the whole time at Eda's side, and wishing to become more intimate, he suddenly turned to her and suggested, "I think it would help to avert suspicion on our journey, if I were to use 'thou' in addressing you, and you likewise with me."

Having offered this short, practical suggestion he turned red, and his heart beat wildly, as he waited for her approval.

"I really am in doubt," she hesitated. "In high society man and wife use 'you' in addressing each other."

"But that might arouse suspicion in our case—I mean, that 'thou' would be more to our purpose," urged Chayim.

She finally consented.

Unfortunately, however, Chayim could find no opportunity for using the coveted familiar pronoun. At last the longed-for chanced arrived. He was gazing out of the window. The sun, like a blood-red disc, was setting behind a thick forest, gilding the tree-tops with its dying splendor. Chayim, entranced by the scene, cried out, "Just see, Eda, see thou, how beautiful!"

Eda arose and looked through the window. "Wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Chayim was right beside her, but instead of

looking at the beautiful sunset he sought to penetrate Eda Sandrovitch's face, and he grew sad.

A moment later and the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, as if the black forest had engulfed it.

They sat down and Eda began: "You know——"

"Thou knowest," corrected Chayim. "We might betray ourselves."

"Don't worry on that score," she replied, stubbornly. "You know that we're almost at the border."

"We should be all the more careful for that very reason. So then, what dost thou say, Eda?"

Eda smiled good-naturedly, replying, "If you desire to play the game, by all means, with the greatest of pleasure!" And then, more playfully, she added, "I say, my dear Sandrovitch, we're soon at the border."

"What of that, darling Eda?" He smiled in return, clasping her velvety little hand.

She did not withdraw her hand. This made Chayim bolder. He pressed closer to her, ever so close, and whispered tenderly, "What a sweet, darling child thou art!"

She gazed at him with her large black eyes, in silence.

At last they pulled into Alexandrovna, the border station. The train suddenly became alive with nervous activity. A tall gendarme with forbidding mustache entered, crying out in official tones, "Passports!"

Chayim Grossman pulled out his passport and gave it to the gendarme.

"And you?" asked the latter in Russian, turning to Eda.

"She is my wife," answered Chayim, in the same language.

"Very well," was the response, as if approving the match. Chayim felt distinctly flattered with the approval.

The gendarme collected the passports of the other occupants and then left, locking the door of the coach.

"And now we are in very truth man and wife," whispered Chayim passionately to Eda.

"Yes, of course," Eda nodded.

Her acquiescence made Chayim very happy, and he turned boldly to her, asking tenderly, "Wouldst thou have a bite to eat?"

She smiled, and replied good-humoredly, "Not I, but perhaps you would—that is, thou wouldst, beloved," she hastened to correct herself.

"Yes, I'm really hungry."

He arose, took down her little traveling bag, which contained their lunch, and gave it to her.

She opened it and took out the food that her mother had prepared.

"Long life to my good mother," blessed Eda, between bites, and her large black eyes grew larger and darker . . .

"Eat, Sandrovitch," she urged Chayim.

"Yes, my little dove, I'll eat."

Eda burst into laughter.

"You're a perfect artist," she whispered into his ear.

"Why?" he asked . . .

"Good heavens!" she replied, feigning anger because he did not understand, and resumed her eating.

At this point the gendarme returned, accompanied by an officer, who returned the passports.

"Boruch Sandrovitch!"

"Here," answered Grossman, not without inner misgivings.

The officer examined him closely, gave him his passport and turned to Eda.

"And you?"

"My husband," she replied, pointing to Chayim.

"All right," assented the officer, genially.

And Chayim Grossman, forgetting the revolution, the barricades, and his hatred of the army, felt deep in his heart a warm gratitude towards that young officer; a few moments later, when the gendarme and the official had gone, he remarked, "There are some good fellows among them, at that."

"Devil take them, every one," dissented Eda, much to Chayim's displeasure.

The train began to move.

"We've crossed the border" she exclaimed joyously.

"We're husband and wife just the same . . . Germany is no better than Russia . . . We must continue to say 'thou' to one another."

"As you say," answered Eda indifferently.

"Let it be 'thou.'"

At each stop the train discharged a large

number of passengers. Soon Eda and Chayim were the only occupants of their coach.

"We are alone!" cried Chayim, in ecstasy.

Eda could not understand his great joy. She looked upon him coldly, saying, "Now I may address you by your real name. And so, Mr. Grossman, what are your plans in Germany?"

"Germany!" Chayim shuddered at the thought. "Germany?" He was silent.

He was at a loss for reply. He suddenly recalled that the game was over; now he faced the real, hard, sad world of fact, and soon the real Sandrovitch would come to claim this beautiful being as his own, while, he, Chayim, in wretched loneliness, would wander aimlessly through the streets of Berlin. The recollection of all this gripped him, and he was overwhelmed by terror of the long, sinister future.

He gazed out of the window. The night was black. Here and there a light would flash by in the darkness—a far-away gleam—would flash by and melt into the night.

—Translated by Isaac Goldberg.

THE KISS

L. SHAPIRO

Rab' Shachneh's hands and feet trembled, and he felt an awful bitterness in the mouth. It seemed to him, sitting in the chair, that the wild uproar of the street, the howling and the whistling, the cracking and the ringing of the shattering window-panes, were taking place within him, within his own head.

The pogrom had broken out with such fearful suddenness that he found himself forced to fly home without stopping to lock his shop. But on reaching home, he discovered no one there. Sarah and the children had, seemingly, managed to hide themselves somewhere, leaving the house and their few belongings in God's care. He himself, however, did not think of hiding. He did not think of anything, in fact. He was conscious only of the wild noises of the street, and the unbearable bitterness in his mouth.

The noises sounded now nearer, now more distant, like the roar of a neighboring conflagration. But suddenly, it surrounded the house on all sides at once. The window-panes cracked, rocks flew into the room; and the next instant, young peasants with flaming, drunken faces, carrying knives and clubs, came crawling through doors and windows.

It then occurred to Rab' Shachneh that he ought to do something about it. And he lifted himself laboriously from the chair, and began

to crawl under a sofa, right before the eyes of the rioters. The peasants roared with laughter.

"Nah! *There* is a fool for you!" and one of them grabbed him by a leg. "Eh, you! Get up!"

This brought Rab' Shachneh to his senses, and he began to weep like a child.

"Boys," he pleaded, "I will let you have everything—the money, the jewelry—everything. Spare my life! Why should you kill me? I have a wife and children."

But nothing availed him. They took everything, and beat him besides, struck him in the face and chest, kicked him in the abdomen with mad fury. He cried, pleaded, and they kept up their beating.

"Vasily, Vasilinka, you know me! Your father worked for us. Haven't we always paid him well? Vasilinka, save me! Save . . ."

A violent blow on the chest cut short his pleading. Two young peasants sat on him and pressed their knees into his abdomen. Vasilinka, a small spare fellow with a crooked face and grey eyes, spoke up proudly:

"You paid him, did you! Father worked, so you paid. I would have just liked to see you refuse to pay him."

Nevertheless it pleased Vasilinka greatly that Rab' Shachneh should have appealed to him for mercy, and he thereupon turned to the others.

"Now, boys, enough! Let the carcass be. You can see that it's barely gasping."

Reluctantly, one by one, the peasants tore

themselves away from their victim, and began to leave the house, smashing whatever articles had previously escaped their notice.

"Nu, Shachneh," Vasily turned to him, "you have me to thank for being alive yet. The boys would have made short work of you, if it hadn't been for me."

He was on the point of leaving with the others, when something occurred to him that made him halt.

"There!" he said, extending his hand to Rab' Shachneh. "Kiss!"

Rab' Shachneh raised his bloodshot eyes and looked at him bewildered. He did not understand.

Vasily's face darkened.

"Didn't you hear me? Kiss, I tell you!"

Two of the peasants halted in the doorway, watching the scene. Rab' Shachneh looked at Vasily and was silent. Vasily's face turned green.

"Ah, Jew-face that you are!" He gnashed his teeth, and drove his open hand into Rab' Shachneh's face. "You hesitate! Oh, boys! Come back here!"

The two peasants came up closer.

"Ah, nu! Get to work, boys. Since he's such a fine gentleman, he's got to kiss my foot! If he won't . . ."

He sat down upon a chair. The two peasants grabbed hold of Rab' Shachneh, and flung him at Vasily's feet.

"Pull off that boot!" Vasily commanded kicking Rab' Shachneh in the mouth.

Rab' Shachneh slowly pulled the boot off the peasant's foot.

They stood face to face—a red dirty foot smelling strongly of perspiration and a beaten-up face with a long, noble, dark beard. Strangely enough the beard wasn't harmed much. It was torn and plucked in but a few spots, but it retained the dignity of respectability. From above, Vasily's crooked face looked down, glaring with its grey eyes.

"Kiss, I tell you!"

And another kick in the face followed the command.

For a moment all was silent and motionless, then Rab' Shachneh bowed down his head, and Vasily emitted a sharp frightful cry. All of the five toes and part of his foot had disappeared into Rab' Shachneh's mouth. The two rows of teeth sank deep into the dirty, sweaty flesh.

What followed was wild and lurid, like an evil, revolting dream.

The peasants struck Rab' Shachneh with their booted feet. They kicked him with such fury that it resounded loud and hollow like an empty barrel. They pulled out his beard in handfuls. They dug their nails into his eyes and tore them out. They searched out the most sensitive parts of his body and ripped out pieces. His body shivered, trembled, bent and twisted. And the two rows of teeth pressed on convulsively closer and closer, and something cracked inside the mouth, the teeth, the bones, or perhaps both. All this while, Vasily raved, shrieked, screeched like a stuck pig.

How long this lasted, the peasants did not know. They had taken no notice of the time. It was only when they saw that Rab' Sachneh's body no longer moved that they stopped at last. A shudder shook them from head to foot when they looked into his face.


His torn out eyes hung loose near the bloody sockets. His face was no longer recognizable; while what was left of his beard hung in blood-congealed strands. The dead teeth, with a piece of the foot still between them, glared like those of a dead wolf.

Vasilinka still wriggled, no longer upon the chair, but upon the floor. His body was twisted like a snake, and from his throat came long-drawn-out, hoarse sounds. His gray eyes grew large, dim and glassy. It was evident that he had lost his mind.

"God help us," the terrified peasants screamed, as they fled from the house.

Out in the street, the pogrom, in all its beastly ferocity, was still raging, and amidst the many noises, no one heard the broken cries of the living man who was slowly expiring within the jaws of the dead man.

Translated by Israel Solon.



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